

## ***Paris: Any time is a good time to visit the “City of Lights”***

Whether you’re passing through for a long weekend or enjoying an extended vacation, the world renowned City of Lights demands to be explored, discovered firsthand, felt, sensed, and remembered.

From a romantic walk along the Seine River or the spectacular views from the Tour Eiffel (Eiffel Tower) to speechless moments before Musée de l’Orangerie (Orangerie Museum) masterpieces, Paris is the indescribable essence of all things French.

The capitol city is not only the country’s influential centre of politics, fashion, business, arts, and science, but it also serves as an important hub of intercontinental transportation. It is home to prominent universities, sport events, opera companies, and museums, attracting more than 30 million foreign visitors a year.

### **City of Love**

And it is not called the most romantic city in the world for nothing. Being with somebody you love or finding love in Paris is an enchanting journey that can’t quite be reproduced anywhere else. It is not difficult to create your very own movie scene. Simply join the thousands of couples who boldly display their affection, regardless of time or location throughout the city.

On the metro, at street-side cafes, parks, or in restaurants, lovers gazing longingly into each other’s eyes or kissing passionately is not a rare scene in the City of Love.

Have a stolen kiss on the Tour Eiffel with the city illuminated beneath your feet. Adore one another over a glass of Bordeaux in a small restaurant near Place de la Bastille or la Conciergerie. Whisper “Je t’aime” on the Pont Neuf, the oldest bridge in Paris, while a warm river breeze blows across your face.



Seine River

### **Fine art**

But loving one another is not the end-all in Paris. The city’s love of fine art is nearly as strong as its fame as a lover’s paradise. A testament to Louis XIV’s reign, magnificent buildings dot the unique landscape, along with historic and architecturally stunning bridges and cathedrals.

An endless list of art galleries will reinforce the visitors’ love of art. In Paris, contemporary and traditional art coexist, the incredible contrasts between them not hidden but screaming for attention. The most discriminating art critics can find art to satisfy the palate in this art capitol.

On any timeline while visiting the city, four must-see art museums include:

**Le Louvre**, arguably the best museum in the world. From its beginnings as a royal fortress to the public institution it is today, le Louvre is a massive structure housing 35,000 works of art displayed over 60,000 square meters of exhibition space. And this does not include the non-permanent collections.

To fully explore le Louvre you need at least four days, but several hours would suffice for visitors who have only enough time to view the most popular pieces, including the Mona Lisa and Venis de Milo.

My personal favorite as far as museums go is the **Musée de l'Orangerie**, a great choice for spending a lazy afternoon. Finally opened, after nearly a decade of renovations, the museum offers a fabulous concentration of masterpieces by Claude Monet, Cezanne, Renoir, Picasso, and many other famous impressionists.

The **Musée d'Orsay** is housed in the former Orsay train station on the banks of the Seine River. It contains mostly French art and is probably best known for its extensive collection of impressionist masterpieces.

The art and cultural experience of visiting the **Centre George Pompidou**, France's national museum of modern art, begins before you actually enter the building. Its architecture demands as much attention as the art displayed inside.

After a leisurely stroll through the museum, visitors can enjoy one of many cozy cafés or lovely art stores surrounding the building.

### **So much to do**

For tourists who are less artistically inclined, a walk along the Jardin des Tuileries (Tuileries Garden), designed by Le Notre, the gardener to King Louis XIV, is highly recommended. The garden stretches along the Seine River from le Louvre to the Place de la Concorde, continuing on to the Champs-Elysees Boulevard, and is scattered with beautiful fountains and statues.



Notre Dame

At the western end of the Champs-Elysees stands the Arc de Triomphe, another famous monument in Paris, where the view from the top surprisingly outshines the one from Tour Eiffel.

Exploration of Ile de la Cité— one of two islands in the Seine River—is a must for first-time visitors to the city. It is the location where Paris was founded, and its western end houses a palace that has stood since Roman times while the eastern end of the island is where the Notre Dame de Paris (Our Lady of Paris) is situated.

The Notre Dame cathedral is widely considered one of the finest examples of French Gothic architecture in the modern world.

Visitors in search of a quiet place to escape in the crowded city center can should visit the Jardin du Luxemburg (Luxemburg Garden). Near the Sorbonne University, it is one of Paris' most famous parks. Here, children can enjoy a puppet theater or rent small remote controlled boats at the octagonal pond (the Grand Bassin) in the center of the park.

Picturesque lawns, alleys, fountains, and statues dot the park. But for those who can tolerate tourist crowds, Disneyland Park is an ideal spot to enjoy all of the over-the-top tourist extremism that you can expect to see at any U.S.- based theme parks.

Traditionalists should enjoy a romantic boat tour on the Seine River and a historic tour of the Moulin Rouge and its cabarets to complete their been-there, done-that in Paris checklist.

### **French cuisine**

Another item to must check-off activity is indulging in French cuisine. If you have ever tried it, then you know that the food is reason enough to visit. If there is one thing you will never forget about Paris, it is the taste of a freshly baked croissant purchased at the local bakery. There is absolutely no comparing an authentic French butter croissant to any other croissant in the world. The delicate layers simply melt in your mouth.

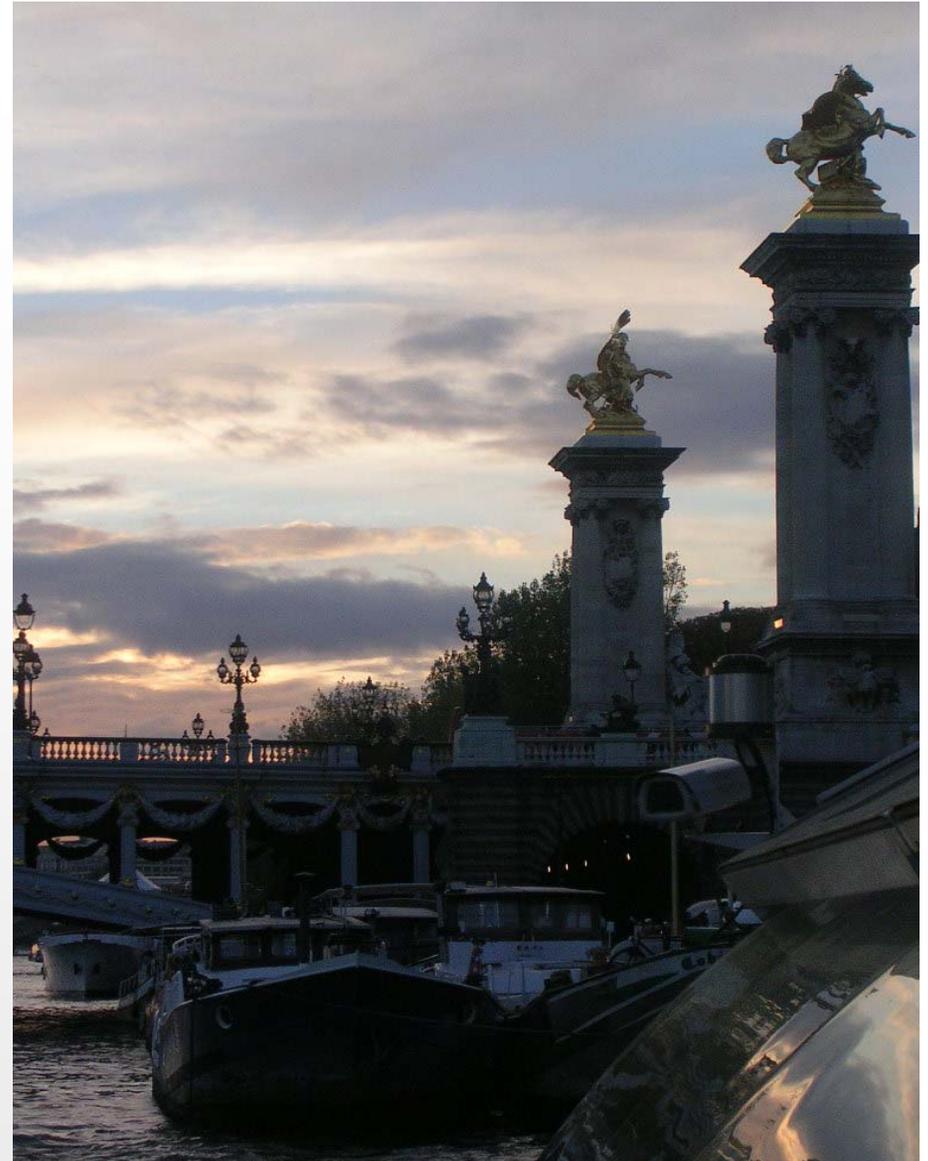
The French have mastered the art of fine dining. Their cuisine is considered some of the world's most refined. Visitors can savor gourmet selections of cheese, chocolate, wine, and seafood. Meals range from very basic—a traditional baguette with cheese and inexpensive wine—to extravagant meals involving half a dozen courses and fine wines consumed over several hours.

No visit to Paris would be complete without at least one meal in a fine restaurant. It may be a little expensive, but if you choose the dinner specials or go during lunchtime, you can enjoy the same great quality at half the price.

It is not uncommon for the French to take a two-hour lunch break, so don't be surprised to see Parisians enjoying an extended lunch and wine in a local bistro.

### **Style, style, style**

From haute couture and luxury stores around the Opera House, one of the most expensive areas of the city, to affordable brands and appealing boutiques, there are shops to tempt every pocketbook.



Seine River

Any variety of small boutiques, charming galleries, and chocolate stores are hidden on the narrow streets on and around Ile de la Cité, and are another way to explore the city all over again.

Even window shopping is a pleasure in Paris, as seductive window displays stimulate the senses and invite you to discover the very essence of French style.

### **Paris—all year long**

As the old song says, Paris is at its best in the springtime, even if it is a little wet. While April in Paris sounds romantic, there are an innumerable number of cultural events taking place in the fall and winter.

While tourists throng to the city year round, many Parisians travel south for the summer. It is a great city wherever you choose to visit, but be prepared for changing weather, and always have an umbrella on hand.

The temperamental weather is part of the city's charm. After all, what is more enjoyable than escaping a rain shower only to end up in a cozy café over a mousse au chocolat and café au lait?

Whatever, whenever, however you decided to explore, Paris will leave you craving for more.

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Montmartre